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Tourists' agency versus the circle of representation

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A B S T R A C T

Tourism studies scholars have criticized but not overcome the passivity inherent in analyses of the reproduction of stereotypes in tourism encounters. Problematizing the category of viewers, I open the black box of the circle of representation as a self-reinforcing process, showing how tourists' (re)production of images of 'the other' is rooted in their agency. Using Q-method and film-assisted observations embedded in ethnography, I describe how Dutch tourists reflexively ignore, interpret and mold contrasting information when they reproduce mythical Maasai imagery. This reproduction often contradicts the 'performance' of their hosts and is not a post-tourist phenomenon. A typology of three tourist perspectives further underlines the non-monolithical nature of these images, and how 'the self' is central in their active reproduction.

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Introduction

It has been argued that tourism, instead of encouraging cultural understanding, reinforces ethnocentrism and tourists' believes in their own worldview (Laxson, 1991) because visitees' "cultural displays serve as a mirror for Western fantasies, reflecting back in performance what the tourists desire" (Bruner 1991, p. 238, see also van Beek, 2003; Wels, 2002). In tourism marketing, there is prominent use of strongly stereotyped images of people from the global South, especially those who are labeled as typical examples of untouched Fourth World peoples (Silver, 1993). The idea that tourism

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interactions follow a circle of representation has been specifically present when describing encounters between Western tourists and these people.

The Maasai, who are often employed as icons of East Africa, are a good example. Bruner describes how Maasai have come to be

> experienced with Westerners.... Maasai understand the Western fantasy about the pastoral life, and willingly play a part to display their Maasai culture, because, as they say, it is what the Westerners want to see and pay for, and they, the Maasai, are in it for the money. It is a self-reinforcing system (Bruner, 2002, p. 390, see also Wijngaarden, 2012).

Based on my research with Kisongo Maasai and Dutch tourists in Northern Tanzania, I feel the need to problematize and refine this simple circular representation model.

My conclusions are based on five years of anthropological research, including a year of fieldwork in the small village of Encoro. Remotely placed between Ngorongoro and Kilimanjaro, this is the site of a small-scale community tourism enterprise that is owned and operated by local people. The Maasai involved have little experience with tourism marketing and limited exposure to Western culture and fantasies. As a result, no functioning circle of representation can be observed (yet): The Maasai of Encoro receive tourists in their village and their homes without putting on an orchestrated performance, often not responding to tourists' expectations of typical Maasai. Although observing this mismatch, visitors nevertheless stubbornly reproduce their images of 'the other' along the lines of existing stereotypes.

In this article I show that even if the imagery that tourists have of Maasai is in line with stereotypes, it is not monolithical, and the Maasai's appearance and behavior has much less influence on the reproduction of this imagery than the argument of the circle of representation suggests. My description of three types of tourist perspectives and their reproduction makes clear that the production of images of 'the other' revolves primarily around the 'self', stressing that in reproductions that are seemingly passive, the tourist is in fact an active agent.

Agency in tourism interactions

It has been argued that in the interaction between hosts and guests, tourists' images of local people are transmitted to them through "the tourist gaze" (Urry, 2002). As a result, when locals commodify parts of (the existing images of) their culture as an object of (cultural)tourism, they strategically make use of the imagery they have learned tourists have of them (Bruner, 2001; Bruner & Kirshenblatt-Gimblett, 1994; Corbey, 1993). Building upon these images they produce a tourist performance which MacCannell calls 'staged authenticity' (1973) and Desmond refers to as 'staging tourism' (1999). The idea of this circle of representation has been useful in the analysis of tourism situations, as it brought to the attention that visitees are active players in tourism interactions, and cannot be considered "passive recipients of an external world which impinges upon them" (MacDonald, 1997, p. 175).

In my research I acknowledge these insights, further extending awareness of the actor status of visitees by specifying how my Maasai research participants comply as well as resist stereotypes that exist of them. Moreover, I research the imagery local Maasai have of tourists with the same depth as the imagery tourists have of them, showing that both images are constructed according to the same abstract patterns, and function following similar dynamics (Wijngaarden, in press). However, in this article I will only deal with the results with regard to the tourists I researched, and focus on the role *their* agency plays in the (re)production of Maasai imagery.

The circle of representation model can easily deemphasize the agency of tourists during interactions with their visitees. To counterbalance this, Rojek and Urry already described tourism as a co-production, underlining that what is shown is never consumed passively, but actively interpreted by the viewers (1997). They explain that although capitalism and commodification have their influence on tourism attractions, this does not lead to monolithic interpretations of these attractions:

> Even the most apparently unambiguous [cultural sites] will be 'read' in different and paradoxical ways by different groups of visitors. There is no evidence that sites are uniformly read and passively accepted by visitors (Rojek & Urry, 1997, p. 14).

Nevertheless, scholars who have occupied themselves with the image of 'the other' have for long observed that this image has been remarkably "persistent" (Harrison, 1995; Kratz & Gordon, 2002), as the same (stereo)types have been replicated for centuries. For example, "the tourist image of the Maasai does not appear to have changed since early European explorers and adventure seekers first encountered the Maasai over 200 years ago" (Tucker & Akama, 2009, p. 509).

In line with these findings, Bruner (2002) has observed a continuous replication of the image of pastoralists in general, and Maasai in particular, and he acknowledges visitees' active role in this reproduction. However, he points out that visitors' responses might have changed even if imagery has remained persistent, because tourists do actively interpret images and ideas they are presented with. In line with Rojek and Urry he feels that

> any tourist attraction is subject to multiple interpretations even if the producers attempt to impose a monolithic meaning. Master narratives provide a preexisting structure, but they are not determinative, nor can they possibly encompass the many possible tourist responses. The tourist story is emergent in the enactment (Bruner, 2005, p. 26).

Bruner points out that too little research has been done to map and understand the nuances of tourists' interpretations, posing that even though the analysis of imagery is useful, "the larger question raised is, how do the viewers and consumers of popular images actually interpret what is shown to them?" (Bruner, 2002, p. 392). Bruner feels it is time to "problematize the category of 'viewers'" (Ibid.), and this is what I will do in this article.

Q method embedded in ethnography

Embedding my methods in reflexive ethnography I collected a variety of data from dozens of tourists from different countries who visited Encoro, using semi-structured interviews, group discussions and (film-assisted) observations. To access the views and experiences of the tourists more deeply, I chose to focus my analysis upon nine Dutch persons, whom I asked to produce mindmaps with the help of cards with statements, before and after their Maasai safari. I systematically compared these mindmaps using Q method, a technique which originally stems from psychology (Stephenson, 1953), in order to create an in depth portrayal of their perspectives, and how these changed as a result of the encounter.

In Q method the statements need to be carefully selected but participants can be chosen more at leisure. Following Q practices, my selection was made to represent as wide a variety as possible, favoring people who have a strong opinion. I chose four men and five women (names anonymized) between 20 and 53 years old with vocational up to MA level university education. Based on the systematic transcription and analysis of an additional 47 interviews with other visitors, 9 group-discussions, 36 hours of filmed material and fieldnotes regarding 21 observed camel safaris, I conclude that the perspectives of the nine tourists I focused on represent the general views and attitudes of the variety of visitors I worked with in Maasailand.

Q method has been employed in tourism studies before (i.e. Fairweather & Swaffield, 2001; Hunter, 2013) and fits well with the more reflexive and critical paths of enquiry tourism studies is evolving to (Stergiou & Airey, 2011). It has proven to be effective in investigating imagery of 'the other', as it facilitates the detection and mapping of impacts of cross-cultural interactions that participants mention as significant, but which remain invisible when using for example statistical measures. This is illustrated by a study on attitude changes in American students as a result of foreign study programs (Sell & Craig, 1983). I showed how this method can be seamlessly combined with ethnographic research, extending anthropologists' opportunities to collect, handle and reflect on their data (Wijngaarden, 2016).

In a Q methodological study, participants are presented with a sample of statements about a topic, which are ideally selected from everyday discourses at the research site. The statements should be "sufficiently comprehensive to demonstrate a range of opinion" (Brown 1993, p. 97), while "the main goal in selecting a Q sample is to provide a miniature which, in major respects, contains the comprehensiveness of the larger process being modeled" (Brown 1993, p. 99). I coded and categorized the relevant statements from ethnographic and interview material collected during my first research period in Encoro. Subsequently, I employed Fisher's experimental design principles and non-random selection from every cell as promoted by today's leading Q researchers, using a point system in order to ensure a heterogeneous and balanced sample.[1] The participants rank-ordered the statements from their individual points of view by placing them on a grid according to how much they agreed or disagreed with them. Subsequently, this Q sort was used to invite participants to elaborate on their interpretations and views. The combined results of the sort and the interview were analyzed using statistical and interpretative methods.

Q is distinct from R methodology as used in surveys, where researchers identify patterns in responses across respondents. In these mathematical operations, correlations between two sets of scores which both have been gathered from the same individual are being compared. In contrast, in Q method, subjects and variables are inverted. [2] While

> R methodological data is derived from a population or sample of individuals each of whom has been subjected to measurement using a collection of different tests[,] Q methodological data ... is derived when a population or sample of tests (or other items) are measured or scaled relatively by a collection of individuals (Watts & Stenner, 2012, p. 15).

In the logic behind R something is done to the person, for instance measuring blood pressure or height, which can be said to be an objective measurement, and the person is passive. In Q, the person actively rank orders items according to his or her point of view. This is subjective because it is not the researcher, but the research participant, who produces a measure of his or her own point of view. While in R method researchers search for intercorrelation (patterns) through a conventional factor analysis (n individuals having been measured in m variables, for example questions), in Q method the factor analysis is inverted because a population of n different variables (in this case statements) is scaled by m individuals. Therefore, it is the individuals (or more specifically, their Q sorts) which are intercorrelated and factorized (Webler et al., 2009). In Q we get to see where people place themselves within the socially available discourse by expressing their point of view about a certain topic. Each person's subjective point of view is approached holistically, and compared with the complete views of other participants.

The quantitative aspects present in some stages of the Q analysis are submissive to the qualitative basis and logic of the method (Brown, 1996). The inverted vector analysis involved solely serves to systematically compare the mindmaps that participants created, providing the researcher with suggestions of patterns that could be found in them. If patterns are present across participants' mindmaps, this suggests "inter-subjective orderings of beliefs that are shared among people" (Webler et al., 2009, p. 8). However, it is only based on the qualitative interviews that the researcher decides whether a convincing case can be made for one or more social perspectives, which is how practitioners of Q method refer to patterns of shared believe.

The interpretation of these social perspectives is done by familiarizing and connecting to the group of people who share this perspective (Montgomery, 2013). As in ethnography, the "research process entails uncovering patterns of beliefs about the phenomenon being studied and the researcher seeks to understand how the participants experience their world" (Fairweather & Rinne, 2012, p. 479). Q method is a non-essentialist, participatory and reflexive method which dovetails with critical and constructivist approaches (Robbins & Krüger, 2000; Stergiou & Airey, 2011; Watts & Stenner, 2005, p. 86). It gives research participants the opportunity to express their subjective points of view and aims at a qualitative understanding of these perspectives.

As Q method is not meant to produce demographic generalizations as surveys do, insights in social perspectives can be gained using only a small number of participants (Brown, 1993, 2003), with social perspectives generally being constructed from the mindmaps of minimally two people (Brown, 1980, p. 293; Watts & Stenner, 2012, p. 131). Fairweather, who has researched and published on the reliability and validity of Q method results for over thirty years, argues that the researcher can be confident that the patterns of belief and meaning consistently found in the sample, reflect viewpoints and ideas that can be found in the rest of the population (1981). Using Q method, I could obtain a clear picture of aspects of Maasai imagery that were shared more widely by tourists, but also illuminate the nuanced differences present, and compare tourists' perspectives before and after they met with the Maasai.

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[1] Details can be found in Wijngaarden (2014).

[2] For detailed description of the procedures of inverted vector analysis and the differences between Q and correlation statistics see Watts and Stenner (2012), Webler, Danielson, and Tuler (2009) and Wijngaarden (2014, p. 88–92).

Consensus and reproduction of the image

The tourists I worked with expressed that their image of Maasai before they arrived was mostly based on what they had seen on television, and to a lesser extend other Northern media, mentioning documentaries and guide books, but also news reports on Africa and (semi)fictional novels and films. Their general imagery of Maasai is clearly consistent, as they characterize them in the first place as typical: A distinguishable people who are strong in culture and live in close proximity to nature. This means to them that Maasai are visibly recognizable, have an exotic, traditional lifestyle, and follow a natural way of life determined by their environment. Secondly, Maasai are characterized as sociable, and described as friendly, helpful and caring.

The characteristics which tourists underline as typical for Maasai include binary aspects which are placed side by side, the perceptions of single tourists typically including seemingly paradoxical elements: Maasai are perceived as particular, standing out from all other Africans, but at the same time they are regarded as representing the quintessential African, symbol for a whole continent; they are characterized as having their lives determined by nature, but at the same time as ruled by culture; they are seen as living statically in history, but simultaneously as very dynamic because of their nomadic heritage as well as their rapid 'development' and adaptation to tourism; their lives are characterized as governed by tradition, but their use of modern technology such as mobile phones and internet is emphasized; they are considered poor and in need of support, but at the same time they are seen as rich and happy; and formal education is deemed a savior to lift them up as well as a threat that will destroy them. By and large, the views of the tourists consistently (re)produce the mythical image of Maasai as red-clad, bead-wearing noble savages following images and descriptions from popular media, tourism advertisements and travel guides.

This exotic image comes as no surprise, as the desire to encounter difference is the very reason tourists visit other cultures (Cohen, 1972; Urry, 2002). For contemporary Westerners, 'othering' often involves ideas of a vanished Eden which is occupied by pre-industrial people (Salazar, 2012). Although this imagery is often applied to non-Western people and places, it is important to note that there are European versions of this wild pre-industrial man too, for instance applied to 'white' Australians (Forsey & Low, 2014).

Although tourists want to encounter strangeness, they wish to do so in a limited and controlled way (Bruner, 1989, p. 438–39; Cohen, 1972, p. 166; van Beek and Schmidt, 2012). Goffman asserts that people try to rely on all sorts of information -including stereotypes- when meeting an 'other', in order to know "who and what he is," as the encounter challenges them to search for "means of predicting his present and future behavior" (1959, p. 1). Cliché images and stereotypes provide clear categorical information, even if this information is distorted or incorrect. The reproduction of 'otherness' in the form of typical, often visually recognizable features, helps tourists to deal with the difference they are confronted with, because it allows them to already 'know' their destination and their hosts. I therefore consider the typical image of 'the other' as a part of the 'tourist bubble' (Craik, 1997; Graburn, 1989; Smith, 1989; van Beek and Schmidt, 2012), which I see as not only consisting of physical infrastructure such as Western hotels, non-local foods and air-conditioned buses, but of all institutions that help separate tourists from anything too alien. Likewise, the characterization of Maasai as very social people, to an important extent based on their role as hospitable hosts, is reproduced to satisfy tourists' desire to face a trustworthy 'other' in a foreign and potentially threatening environment.

Dealing with cognitive dissonance

During tours, tourists are often not simply or only presented with displays that reflect the already familiar images they anticipate. When visiting Encoro, they are confronted with the fact that the Maasai they encounter are in many ways not quite as they imagined them. However, despite experiences which contradict the mythical image they have of Maasai, visitors hardly change their views of them. Generally, the earlier mentioned combinations of opposing characteristics are reproduced and sharpened as a result of the contact. Striking is that tourists consciously reflect on how their own observations do not match their imagery. They admit that their perspective on the Maasai is more confused or changed as a result of their safari. However, subsequently, instead of adapting their imagery, they struggle to fit their experiences into the existing mythical image. In the process they hijack cultural relativistic arguments, select and reinterpret particular information and get into ambiguous explanations. Often, specific concepts are made relative while others are deemed more absolute, and tourists represent the supposed voice of the Maasai without being informed about their views, in fact often ignoring the Maasai's own opinions when they are offered.

For example, the visitors generally feel touched, and some are even emotionally overwhelmed, when confronted with the poverty the local Maasai live in. Her voice thick with emotion, Linda states "to think that those people live like that day in day out." Other tourists refer to the situation they encounter as "actually more poverty stricken than I expected", and many use words such as "challenging" and even "shocking". However, when creating their mindmap after their visit, most of these same tourists agree more with the statement that Maasai are rich than they did before their visit. In their explanations, they present the poverty of the Maasai as a cultural trait or chosen way of life, suggesting that the Maasai have an alien frame of reference, sometimes even involving ideas of 'the other' as childish or irrational. This contrasts sharply with the understandings of the Maasai themselves, who feel that their people have become impoverished only recently as a result of (post-)colonial dynamics that led to a loss of grazing lands and the increased importance of formal education. The visitors prefer to explain the Maasai's situation as a result of (cultural) difference rather than the result of a dynamic and relational situation of divergent wealth and power. In this process, the image of the noble savage, who might not be rich materially, but who experiences wealth in his own environment, is emphasized rather than nuanced.

Another example is that tourists, when they meet Maasai who live in a way that does not fit their mythical image of them, discount them as 'not real' Maasai. When Maasai encountered in the city or in Encoro turn out not to be the pre-modern, social savages who live utopic, natural lives, tourists decide that "originally", "traditionally" or "primarily" Maasai *do* fit the image of them. They thus refuse to question imagery preoccupied with 'typical' and 'traditional' traits, even if these are not representative of the varied and dynamic realities they encounter, rendering the mythical image of Maasai more absolute in the process.

Furthermore, the image of Maasai as sociable prevails in tourism contexts, even when in the past Maasai have often stereotypically been presented as fearsome and ferocious devils (Hughes, 2006) and these days still, "the quintessential Maasai" is pictured as a spear carrying warrior (Bruner & Kirshenblatt-Gimblett, 1994, p. 137). Most tourists in first instance laugh at the idea that the often indeed armed Maasai could be aggressive or dangerous, and use an extraordinary abundance of absolute terms in their responses, such as Renate who laughingly says "I *really, totally* cannot imagine *at all* that I should be afraid of a Maasai" (emphasis mine). This position is held on to, even if tourists are confronted with information of recent local ethnic unrest, or when tourists' children point to the incoherency of their parents' outspokenly unconcerned reactions. During more confidential interactions later in the evening some tourists come back to the subject and share with me how they "try to deliberately ignore" and "tone down" possible danger or violence during their holiday, as their visit to the Maasai would be illogical and uncomfortable if they would focus on such aspects.

The image of 'the other' is thus held onto not because it describes 'the other' so well, but because it helps to facilitate the interactions and relationship with him. The portrayal of Maasai as typical and sociable noble savages provides tourists with a reason for and legitimation of their visit, and facilitates for functioning, beneficial interactions with their hosts. Although aware that it does not (fully) reflect their encounters when they meet with Maasai, tourists choose not to allow any of their contrasting experiences to affect their imagery, as letting go of the known image of 'the other' would be more uncomfortable than living with the cognitive dissonance that is created by the gap between image and experience.

That letting go of the image leads to problematic situations is supported by observations by Abbink, who described encounters between tourists and Suri in southern Ethiopia. These interactions were generally upsetting and sometimes even dangerous for both sides, because the Suri did not meet up to the ideas tourists had of primitive, untouched people, while the tourists did not fit in the image Suri had of polite and developed foreigners (2000). Abbink argues that as the Suri are little exposed to tourists, they are resisting instead of performing according to the image that exists of them, because a functioning circle of representation has yet to establish itself. My case shows that it is not essential that a functioning circle of representation is in place: Although there might be limits to the cognitive dissonance tourists may be able to deal with, imagery may be reproduced and interactions can run smoothly even if hosts do not perform in accordance with expectations.

Abbink's as well as my own findings during conflicts between Maasai and Western visitors do however point to a relationship between the breakdown of the noble savage image and the loss of cooperative interaction. I found that Maasai as well as tourists have a noble image of each other, which produces the reason and context for their interaction, providing a framework that facilitates the encounter between strangers. Both sides use this imagery as a cushioning device to legitimize and secure their own position, even if 'the other' does not behave according to expectations. When image and performance do not match, repeated encounters cause the cognitive dissonance between this noble image and negative experiences with 'the other' to rise, and this leads to strong contradictory feelings with regard to 'the other'. Although the noble image of 'the other' continues to exist, its ignoble counterpart increasingly comes into view. In this view 'the other' is not approached as a utopic being living without need in harmony and peace, but as crazy, unpredictable and irrational, a non-human. In the light of this duality, the relationship with 'the other' is not only one of cooperation and aid, but also of conflict and exploitation.

Both images are alternative strategies to deal with strangeness and inequality. Tourists can legitimize the position of 'the self' in relation to 'the other' in the context of disparity in power and wealth either by following the rationale that Maasai are living the fulfilled life of noble savages who are not in need, or by legitimizing their poverty and lack of power by demonizing them. However, based on the ignoble image of 'the other', positive interaction and tourism become impossible, and this is why both sides make efforts to maintain and return to the positive view even when it does not fit their experiences.

When the noble imagery of 'the other' does breaks down, this often happens in the form of a dramatic shift, which can include the (threat of) violence. Combining my results of tourists with the analysis of longer term interactions between the Encoro Maasai and Western NGO workers, I have come to the conclusion that changes in the imagery of 'the other' are not so much dependent on the observation of contrasting characteristics of 'the other', but are more likely to come in reaction to shifts in the positions of 'self' and 'other' and the relationship between them.[3] As Michael Jackson put it: "Consciousness is the natural state of human existence, but notions of subject and object, ego and alter, are not given but made" (1998, p. 6). Therefore, "otherness, like selfhood, is initially an *outcome* or product of intersubjective engagement, not a given property of existence" (Ibid., p. 11). The image of 'the other' is a continuously reconstructed projection, which is guided not primarily by observations, but by actors' relative position and relationship with this 'other'.

Post-tourists and active image reproductions

My findings contribute to the discussion on post-tourists, which evolved as an answer to the portrayal of tourists as passive recipients of what hosts perform for them. The term post-tourists was coined by Feifer (1985) to describe a new type of tourism in which the commodification of the experience has come to be accepted and enjoyed in its own right. Post-tourists "know that there is no authentic tourist experience" (Urry, 2002, p. 12) and instead are in search of inauthenticity and perfect simulations (Craik, 1997; Ritzer & Liska, 1997). They

> are less concerned with authenticity than with seeing a good show.... Their enjoyment of the experience is more important than the accuracy of the representation [and they] do not really take seriously the Western fantasy of the primitive [and] untouched (Bruner, 2002, p. 390).

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[3] This also lies at the roots of the rationale behind ethnographic fieldwork, where the researcher deeply immerses himself in local contexts, to engage in social positions that give access to new understandings.

Post-tourists have come to expect, anticipate and enjoy the ‘staged authenticity’ of the tourism experience and by playing along they actively cooperate in the construction of tourist dramas.

My research participants do not take the completely naïve position of equaling the imagery of the noble savage with reality without making any reservations. They do not view ‘the other’ as completely static and unchangeable, as their views also incorporate aspects of the idea of the Westernised savage who has learned to make money from tourists. However, in my own research as well as at other sites (Ritzer, 1997, p. 108; Rojek & Urry 1997, p. 19), visitors do not behave (consistently) as post-tourists. The guests in Encoro are not looking for a show, but desire and believe in the possibility of an authentic tourist experience. They chose to visit this specific project because they are searching for a ‘back region’ which is little rationalized and far from the efficient and commercialized Maasai tourism environments, such as cultural villages build for tourists near major attractions (see Ritsma & Ongaro, 2002).

Although these visitors take into account that their visit may involve minor aspects of commerce or performance, they expect these to be overshadowed by genuine contact with ‘the other’. In contrast to post-tourists, they take the Western fantasy of the untouched and primitive ‘other’ seriously, considering the mythical image of the noble savage a largely accurate description of reality. They argue that although some of the ‘typical aspects’ of Maasai life and culture might be changing, these people still by and large resemble the ideal noble savage and did so even more fully in the past. Based on my findings I thus argue that post-tourists are not the only tourists who actively cooperate in reconstructions of mythical images of ‘the other’ to satisfy their own consumption. Also tourists believing in the authenticity of their experience actively recreate their image of ‘the other’ in line with pre-existing ideas.

Three variations in tourists’ views

I analyzed the views of my tourist research participants in greater detail by combining the data from the mindmaps they created before and after the safari with the video recordings from their interactions and their reflections upon their views and encounters during interviews and group discussions. This revealed that beyond the commonalities I described above, three social perspectives can be distinguished. These social perspectives are relatively slight variations of the standard mythical image present in all tourists’ views, as different aspects of this image become (de)emphasized. Nevertheless, the impact of these variations is considerable, as tourists from different social perspectives do not only have divergent attitudes towards Maasai, but also come to completely different interpretations when observing the same events.

Tourists from the social perspective of *fundamental difference* use their own view as the self-evident measure or starting point when they construct their ideas about ‘the other’. From this rigid standpoint they deem the Maasai as absolutely different from themselves. Compared to those from other social perspectives, these tourists have most difficulties with their own position as wealthy ‘whites’ or tourists. They see tourism as tragically polluting a pure culture, worry about their hosts’ authenticity and their commercial incentives towards them, easily expecting that they might be exploited. They see ‘the self’ and ‘the other’ as ultimately separated and feel this separation should be celebrated and protected, even if it is a cause for conflicting interests.

Tourists with the perspective of *relative difference* are characterized by a dual attitude, underlining not only the differences between ‘self’ and ‘other’ but also the commonalities and shared humanity between them. These tourists most eagerly integrate paradoxical views of Maasai as supposedly living traditional lives in a static past, with them as dynamically modern and ‘civilized’ people who use modern technology. They perceive changes in Maasai society only partly as tragic, arguing that ‘development’ is a tragedy mostly for tourists such as themselves, feeling more concerned with what might be best for ‘the other’. They often change from their own perspective into the presumed standpoint of the Maasai, taking a reflexive and empathic position, and feel quite at ease with their own identity as paying visitors.

Finally, tourists from the social perspective of *mystical difference* start from the presupposition that they cannot understand or bridge the strangeness of ‘the other’. They are most shocked by the ‘primitivism’, ‘lack of civilization’ and poverty they are confronted with, experiencing their encounter and the behavior of the Maasai as authentic and un-orchestrated. They are undecided whether change or 'development' is tragic or whether it could be positive for 'the other'. They see the Maasai as absolutely different in an unknown and unpredictable way, and as a result are most worried about the possibility of Maasai being dangerous.

In both the perspectives of *fundamental* and *mystical difference,* the emphasis lies on disparity and the resulting separation of 'the self' from 'the other'. What distinguishes them however, is that tourists with the perspective of *fundamental difference* feel they know *how* the other is different, which helps them to deal with this strangeness. In contrast, to those with the *mystical difference* perspective, 'the other' remains predominantly obscure and alien, which magnifies feelings of insecurity when dealing with his strangeness. On the other side of the spectrum, those with the social perspective of *relative difference* see their separation from the Maasai as less fundamental, and more as a result of context and circumstances. While acknowledging the differences they also view similarity as an integral part of 'the other' and thus suppose a relationship characterized by interconnections. As a result, they deal with the strangeness of 'the other' by attempting to bridge it, for example by placing themselves in the other's shoes (Table 1).

These different standpoints with regard to strangeness, expressed in terms of similarity and interconnectivity, have implications for how 'the other' is perceived, and have an impact on how the contact between 'self' and 'other' in the context of tourism is evaluated. Tourists deal with the tensions that come with encountering strangeness by acknowledging they cannot understand or bridge it, which is a slightly insecure position (*mystical difference* perspective); by understanding this strangeness on their own personal terms and defending themselves from it (*fundamental difference* perspective); or by attempting to bridge it by taking the position of 'the other' and emphatically understand the world on his terms (*relative difference* perspective). Every social perspective is correlated with how 'the self' perceives the degree and quality of similarity (comparability or conformity) and interconnectivity (relationship) between himself and 'the other', and leads to differences in the perspective on 'the other' and on the experiences with him.

Implications of the social perspectives

The different social perspectives on 'the other' thus represent different ways of positioning 'the self' in relation to 'the other' and deal with the difference encountered. Each involves a strategy which tourists use to deal with the strangeness of 'the other' they are confronted with. In practice, in all tourists a combination of these social perspectives can be found, and each is mixing strategies to a certain extent. However, each tourist favors a certain way of viewing. As an illustration of what kind of implications these three approaches towards difference have, I will give some concrete examples of the divergent reactions tourists have on what they encounter in Encoro.

When dealing with the statement of Maasai being clean, all visitors take into account the circumstances under which the local Maasai live, but tourists from different social perspectives come to different final conclusions. Those with the perspective of *fundamental difference* are likely to straightforwardly mention their personal opinion, without nuancing their views or taking an emphatic stance. Simply taking their own views as their measuring point, they conclude that Maasai are not clean.

> Bart: They are [...] definitely not clean [...]. As there are actually many flies hanging around, and that sand, and the houses are also made of excrement. So I think like, well, yes, I understand that it has to be that way and they are doing a really good job, I find it truly impressive, but it is not clean [...]. I do have some understanding for it, but surely it is as it is [laughs].

Typical for the perspective of fundamental difference is that tourists hold on to their own judgments and frame of reference as valid for both themselves as well as the Maasai.

In the *relative difference* perspective, tourists approach the situation of the Maasai empathically, imagining themselves in their shoes and making cleanliness into a concept that can be understood in many different ways.

Table 1
Summary major distinguishing aspects of social perspectives.

	Similarity	Interconnectivity	Results contact
Perspective 1 Fundamental difference	Other is very different but in a predictable way	Other is separated in an absolute way	Contact and change are bad for other
Perspective 2 Relative difference	Other is different and the same	Other is connected	Contact and change are good for other
Perspective 3 Mystical difference	Other is extremely different	Other is separated by remaining unknown	Contact and change could be good for other

> Fredrik: Clean, yeah, what is clean? I mean, if you live here and you have little water then you are dusty. Yes, maybe then you are not clean. Well, what is clean, right? That is also such a relative concept, I cannot do anything with it.

Tourists with this perspective reflexively observe their own value judgments while acknowledging that due to the circumstances in which they live, Maasai possibly have different subjective experiences, and acknowledge that these are also valid. They argue that it is all a matter of context, and therefore do not deem Maasai either clean or not clean.

Tourists who are associated with the perspective of *mystical difference* feel that Maasai probably are clean, but in a way that is so exotic and alien that, as Europeans, they are unable to recognize this.

> Linda: They are I think [clean] in their own way, because we experienced that last time as well, that indeed they had a certain smell around them, but that is of course also their way of being clean.

Typically, the line of thought in this perspective is that one cannot actually know much about the Maasai, or judge them, because they are so different that they cannot be understood.

Different interpretations of the same experiences

I will use the case of Bart and Garret to further illustrate how far-going the implications of the different perspectives are. Bart and Garret came to Encoro in the same group and underwent the same safari, which was the first encounter with Maasai for both of them. Analyzing my video material I could see that during the village visit and the subsequent interactions and walk through the area they were together. During all the transactions that took place when their fellow female travelers bought beadwork, they were standing side by side, observing the same scenes unfolding before them, however, through different eyes. Bart, coming from a *fundamental difference* perspective, and Garret, with the social perspective of *relative difference,* interpreted what happened in radically different ways and came to very different conclusions as a result.

Bart experienced the Maasai as being pushy and acquisitive with regard to selling themselves and their products, calling them “greedy” and “exploitative.” Commenting on the transactions that took place during the village visit, he feels the Maasai increased the prices of their products outrageously, just because of dealing with wealthy ‘whites’, and experiences this as unfair. He also comments negatively on the fact that some Maasai ladies asked members of his tourist group to buy wristbands while they were passing by their homestead, feeling that this kind of behavior spoils the culture, and that tourists should not buy anything because this makes the people “even more pitiful.” However, most of all he resents the Maasai playing a role:

> They capitalize very much on that they are poor, pitiful, and that we aren’t [. . .]. They are playing on that of course [. . .] but ehm . . . I feel like, they are going just a *little bit* too far in that (emphasis in original, indicating he makes an understatement).

As a result of his experiences during the safari, Bart concludes that Maasai are more exploitative than he thought, and constantly interact with the tourists with monetary objectives in mind.

In contrast, Garret, who observed all these same instances, empathically imagines what it would be like to find oneself in the context under which the Maasai in Encoro live, and feels impressed with how relaxed and permissive they behave under these circumstances.

> That also struck me with the payment of that money, for example, or that jewelry. Like, 'here you go', [...] 'just choose something' and not like 'you need to get mine, you need to get mine' or anything like that, no not at all. So [laughs] also really modest and so on, not at all greedy or anything, no ... no and if you also see what they have there, well, what *do* they have there? (emphasis in original).

Whereas Bart feels that the Maasai should remain more true to themselves and their culture, and repeatedly expresses that in fact the Maasai are already too much corrupted by a commercial attitude, Garret observes that the commercial attitude of the Maasai is not present enough. In his eyes the Maasai

> have difficulty to actually make contact [...]. They cannot indicate for themselves how much they want to have for their things. Like, they have made something and they would like to sell it to have an income, but they do not know how to get someone to buy it [...] No, [they] haven't got a clue about it, according to me.

In complete opposition to Bart, Garret concludes that it would be positive if the Maasai increased their commercial attitude.

More generally, a greedy and aggressive attitude of 'the other' is highlighted by tourists with the social perspective of *fundamental difference*, while the qualities of respectful modesty and calm peacefulness are underlined extensively by the tourists who view Maasai from a standpoint of *relative difference*. This is true even if the tourists in question are reflecting upon the very same situations.

Perspectives guide interpretations

I argue that tourists from each perspective come to divergent conclusions about 'the other's' behavior, thoughts and motivations, because they assume attitudes and motivations in 'the other' that reflect their own. Tourists with the perspective of *fundamental difference* suppose 'the other' views and deals with them non-emphatically from his own point of view, as they also approach him and perceive the interactions from the view of opposing incentives and conflicting interests that cannot be bridged.

For example, as typical for his social perspective, Bart sees a rigid people, who are absolutely different from him. He takes his own position and opinion as the starting point, and assumes the Maasai do the same and treat him according to their own point of view, in a non-empathic way. Confronted with a difference in wealth, he experiences a situation in which he and 'the other' selfishly face each other, each having incompatible views and interests, and both with the goal of defending and furthering their own well-being. From his point of view as a tourist, he regrets any changes in Maasai society, feeling that commercialization and money spoil them, an attitude shared with others in this perspective.

This undivided and absolute way of reasoning stands in contrast to the approach of Garret, who, as typical for those coming from a perspective of *relative difference,* employs a much softer and more empathic approach. Although tourists from this perspective are also confronted with the difference in wealth between themselves and 'the other', they approach the Maasai from an idea of shared humanity and see this reflected in their experiences with them, Garret for example observing the Maasai to be open to sharing with each other as well as with the tourists.

Also typical for tourists with the social perspective of *relative difference,* is a dual impression of Maasai as 'primitive' but simultaneously taking part in 'modern' commercial interactions. This is reflected in Garret's idea that the Maasai are not completely successful in making business, and incorporate traditional and communal aspects in their behavior. However, the fact that they are making business is not considered as tragic, because although it might be a spoiler for tourists' experiences, it will improve the quality of living for the Maasai themselves. Thinking in terms of mutual understanding and cooperation, Garret, as others with this social perspective, is more at ease with his position as a tourist. Tourists with the perspective of *relative difference* anticipate that, just as they do themselves, 'the other' also perceives them in terms of difference as well as similarity. As they emphatically try to connect with and understand 'the other' in the context he is in, they assume 'the other' is also likely to have understanding for them and their position.

Finally, tourists with the perspective of *mystical difference* also see their own attitude reflected in 'the other'. Approaching the Maasai as very alien from themselves, they suppose the Maasai experience the same. As a result they are anxious that possibly dangerous misunderstandings could arise. Karin for example worries that her and her children's body language will be misread by the Maasai. These tourists feel that as they cannot understand 'the other', 'the other' can also not understand them. Therefore they appreciate any way in which their hosts try to facilitate for them, and experience it as natural and soothing when the Maasai treat them as tourists, taking into account that they are different.

The different perspectives tourists have of 'the other' are thus not simply the result of differences in experiences or exposure in relation to him, but instead, experiences with 'the other' are interpreted differently as a result of the person involved having a different perspective. This conclusion is supported by the fact that none of the participants changed social perspectives as a result of their safari with the Maasai; even those who shared the safari experience maintained their contrasting social perspectives.

The centrality of 'self' in images of 'the other'

Both the tourists' reproduction of the general mythical image of Maasai in the face of contrasting experiences, as well as their reproduction of imagery along the lines of their specific social perspective, show the central position of 'the self' in the (re)production of images of 'the other'. In other contexts, it has been acknowledged that images which concern 'the other' are indirectly also images which concern 'the self.' Nederveen Pieterse for example shows that throughout history, the European image of 'the other' has changed in accordance with alterations in European culture and phases in colonial expansion, arguing that these images do not circulate because they form accurate descriptions of observed realities, but rather because they reflect the incentives of the producers and consumers of these images. The continued analysis of images of 'the other' including their subtle dynamics and variations is useful, as these form essential indications of the dynamics and shifting patterns of ideas, interests and relationships (Nederveen Pieterse, 1990, p. 232).

In tourism research Craik has already argued that

> in contrast to what is commonly assumed, the cultural experiences offered by tourism are consumed in terms of prior knowledge, expectations, fantasies and mythologies *generated in the tourist's origin culture* rather than *by the cultural offerings of the destination* (Craik, 1997, p. 118, emphasis in original).

I provided a detailed description of a case in which the stubborn reproduction of images of 'the other' on the side of tourists does not rely on a circle of representation in which hosts successfully reproduce the image they expect their visitors have of them. When analyzed from a structural perspective, the dynamics behind the seemingly self-reinforcing reproduction of stereotypes remained a black box. However, my focus on the agency of the tourists provides deeper insight in how this reproduction is in fact accomplished: Tourists actively select, interpret, mold, ignore, circumvent and transform (contrasting) experiences with 'the other', as they reconstruct the images that facilitate for their interaction and legitimate their relationship with this 'other'. The confirmation and strengthening of already existing attitudes, observed for a long time in tourism research (Pearce, 1982), is not the result of tourists' lack of access to new information, as has sometimes been suggested (Bruner, 1991, p. 246). It also takes place when tourists get in touch with new information, even in cases where (some of) this information is perceived as a shocking mismatch to the existing image.

The central mythical image of Maasai as well as the variety of social perspectives tourists have, show that images of 'the other' are constructed with 'the self' as the point of focus. These images are therefore reproduced along similar lines as long as tourists' position in relation to their hosts remains unchanged, and are unlikely to change based on a contrasting performance by the hosts.

However, it requires agency on the side of the visitors to continually reproduce these images in the face of contrasting experiences.

Conclusion

Recently, researchers who approach tourists' images as a dynamic practice and present themselves as ''highly sympathetic to moving beyond the kinds of passivity ... evident in 'circles of representation' analyses of tourism experiences'' (Forsey & Low, 2014, p. 167) concluded that stereotypical images are more stubbornly reproduced than they had expected, even in the case of highly educated, longer term visitors such as exchange students. I argue that their conclusion that researchers have sometimes tended to ''overemphasize the agency of their subjects'' (Ibid.), is not justified, but rather, that the answer lies in their observation that ''shifts away from the dominant images ... occurred only when the students began to re-organise their ideas about the [place] in response to their changing relationship with it'' (Ibid.). Images of 'the other' are adapted, not so much due to changes in characteristics of 'the other' but due to changes in the circumstances of 'the self', or changes in the relationship between 'self' and 'other' (Nederveen Pieterse, 1990, p. 233).

I argue that the persistence of an image does not mean that it has been passively accepted, but instead, shows it has been actively reproduced. Agency is characterized by a reflexive capacity that is necessary for intentionality (Eriksen, 2001, p. 48). I found that tourists who visit Maasai and interact with them relatively superficially for only a few hours exhibit the same ability to critically reflect on the stereotypes of their hosts as the exchange students Forsey and Low researched (2014, p. 168). They consciously reflect that many of the events they observe at the tourism site do not comply with their preconceived images. Nevertheless, tourists make the choice and effort to reproduce the pre-existent image they have of Maasai, not so much because they found this imagery accurately describes these people, but because it serves to legitimize their position and relationship with them. The imagery tourists have of Maasai is thus confirmed and even strengthened in the tourism encounter because it has far more to do with 'the self' than with 'the other'.

This argument is further supported by my description of three different types of tourist perspectives and their implications. The social perspectives of *fundamental difference*, *relative difference* and *mystical difference* form three strategies for dealing with the strangeness of 'the other'. Comparing reactions from tourists with different social perspectives shows how visitors reproduce their images confirm their own perspective of 'the other': Observing the same situations, they come to highly divergent interpretations of the Maasai's behavior, thoughts and motivations, as they project their own attitude onto 'the other'.

Whether hosts' 'performance' is in line with tourists' expectations and whether tourists consider this 'performance' as authentic does not determine the reproduction of the image of these hosts in the tourists' perception. Although providing some information about 'the other', these images are not primarily based on, and thus do not easily change as a result of observed characteristics or behavior of 'the other'. Instead, these images form part of narratives and strategies that entail definitions of 'self' which are formulated in relation to that which is considered 'not-self'. Involving reflexive and active processes, such as the selection and molding of information, the (re)construction of images of 'the other' is rooted in the agency of their producers. Strategies and projects that have the objective of breaking down stereotypes in and outside tourism are thus more served by influencing the position and relationship of viewers with regard to 'the other' than with providing them with contrasting information.

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